

2019

De Mazenod Conference

A Pathway of the Heart: Renewing the Catholic Church

February 15-17, San Antonio

Conference Report, Findings, Recommendations

A Pathway of the Heart was co-sponsored
by the
Missionary Oblate Partnership and Oblate School of Theology

Summary Statement

On a weekend in February, 2019, 65 men and women gathered, at the invitation of Oblate School of Theology and the Missionary Oblate Partnership for a conference entitled *A Pathway of the Heart: Renewing the Catholic Church*. The methodology of the Conference is outlined in the report, so this summary addresses three questions: 1) What inspired the theme of the Conference? 2) What was the spirit of the Conference? 3) What practical and potentially transformative insights emerged?

What inspired the theme of this Conference?

The conference looked, from a crisis perspective, at Church governance, parish life, and abuse-related justice concerns. The report details both the discussion and findings for each, but all those roads really lead to one underlying pathology: a clerical culture that has negatively affected Church life at all levels. Clericalism is the general toxin that needs to be acknowledged and it is the filter of concern through which all issues need to be reviewed.

Spirit of the Conference

The spirit among the 65 conferees was one of compassion, hopefulness and conviction. Abiding *compassion* for the entire body of the Church and particularly for those who have been victimized by Church in a variety of ways, including her ordained ministers. *Hopefulness*, not born of naivete but of a confidence that looking at issues courageously will offer pathways for healing and growth. *Conviction*, that the voices being raised now by this Conference, and in the pews and sanctuaries, will not stop until things systemically change.

What practical and transformative insights emerge?

All participants recognize clearly that structures need to change but that we are not the ones with much material control. Hence a primary insight was the recognition of a need for widespread

and formal dialogue that engages all levels of Church structure. The top issues we would suggest greater dialogue on are the following: 1) *examination of Church structures with an eye toward improving transparency, accountability, and mutual co-responsibility at all levels*, 2) *review of priestly formation*, and 3) *an intentional and proactive increase in diverse advisory bodies covering all aspects of Church life*.

Introduction

On the weekend of February 17 – 19, 2019 a group of 65 participants gathered at the Oblate School of Theology (OST) in San Antonio for the 2019 De Mazenod Conference *A Pathway of the Heart: Renewing the Catholic Church*. The weekend of reflection and feedback was co-sponsored by OST and the Missionary Oblate Partnership, a ministry of the US Province of Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. The Catholic audience was very diverse: young and old, ordained and lay, religious and diocesan, academic and pastoral, progressive and conservative, married and single. The goal of the weekend was to listen, reflect, and then offer feedback to the US Conference of Catholic Bishops on the topic of Church renewal in the midst of the present crises. President of the Partnership, Arthur A. Pingolt, Jr. in his opening remarks, sought to anchor the weekend in the love and the mercy of Christ. Recalling the words of Catholic mystic Dame Julian of Norwich “*in weal and in woe, all shall be well,*” we recall that it is sin, the origin of pain, which drives one to seek the mercy of God.¹ Framing the multitude of emotions and consequences resulting from the sexual abuse and other Church crises, the lens of love and mercy was offered as foundational to a dialogue that is hopeful. Pingolt encouraged the group to be the Church “Conversant” in the call TO dialogue amidst adversity.

¹ Julian of Norwich. *Showings*. Edited and Translated by Edmund Colledge and James Walsh. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978.

Conference Summary: Presenters + Feedback

Kerry Robinson: *Crisis As Opportunity*

To facilitate a focused engagement by the participants, Kerry Robinson, Global Ambassador for the Leadership Roundtable provided the keynote address: *Crisis As Opportunity*. After contextualizing her comments within her own faith-life, Robinson identifies that out of the sexual abuse crisis opportunities exist: to create a new culture of servant leadership, to implement a new managerial paradigm, and to create a genuine partnership in co-responsibility between the laity, vowed religious, and ordained clergy. Recapping the history of the United States Catholic Church sexual abuse history, Robinson encouraged the group by celebrating the success of the Dallas Charter in affording significant protection for children. Robinson asserted that “*the very safest place for a child to be right now, anywhere in the world, is the Catholic Church in the United States.*”

Contrasting the abuse crises of 2002 and 2018, Robinson highlights the following four differences. First, there is a new generation of young adults learning the details of abuse for the first time. Secondly, there is now, as there wasn't in 2018, a cumulative effect of frustration, anger, shame, sorrow, and horror within the Church. Thirdly, the American cultural movement of #MeToo provides an impetus absent in 2002. Fourth, there is a widespread disappointment that Church leaders, especially bishops, were not held accountable for their failures, both of commission and omission.

Robinson shared that The Leadership Roundtable see two principal crises to address: the crisis of the sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults and the crisis of distrust of Church leadership. She said that both of these emerge from a culture of clericalism that has resulted in 1) an erosion of the moral authority of the Church in the public square, 2) a reduced reception of

the Church's evangelization efforts, 3) a destruction of the credibility of Church leadership, 4) a disengagement of a generation from the faith, and 5) a jeopardization of the Church's financial stability.

Robinson's keynote inspired a lively discussion organized around the themes and concerns that participants believe must be included in future Church dialogues:

- * myopic clericalism (*"clericalism"* understood as natural privilege or special preference afforded to ordained clergy)
- * the unfair implication of homosexuality as the origin of the crisis
- * the role of women in Church leadership
- * the necessity of diversity in Church leadership
- * the presence of a diabolical force active within the Church
- * the recognition of a historical pattern of crisis found within the Church,
- * a call for the Catholic Church to be a global leader in the prevention of future abuse
- * the resistance of the US Church to embrace the changes proposed at Vatican II.

These themes were noted as "foundational" for subsequent conference dialogue and analysis. **KEY INSIGHT:** A key insight gleaned from the opening session was the understanding that culture takes a generation to change, and that the current effort to move the Church beyond the sexual abuse crisis can be seen as our gift to the next generation of American Catholics.

The second day of the conference was structured to encourage dialogue with an opportunity to deepen reflection through small group work. Four mini-keynote sessions were provided to facilitate focused analysis.

Seamus Finn, OMI: *Challenges to Improved Governance*

Reverend Seamus Finn, OMI presented the first mini-key-note address. Finn is the Chief of Faith Consistent Investing for the Oblate International Pastoral Investment Trust, consultant to the Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation office of his congregation and Chair of the Board of Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility.

Finn presented a reflection on Church Governance highlighting the historical and organizational structure of the Holy See and the Vatican City State inclusive of the Roman Curia, the political and theological challenges to governance, and the impact and aftermath of the Second Vatican Council upon Church Governance. The small group discussion that followed explored an identification of opportunities to improve governance at the parish level, an identification of examples of best governance practices in other churches or organizations, and an identification of suggestions for governance and administrative practices that could improve the governance of religious congregations.

There emerged small group consensus as to the barriers to effective governance structures applicable to parish and religious congregations:

- *current Church culture
- * lack of trust in the leader and the leader's administrative competency
- *underutilization of the talents of the laity
- *absence of diversity in governance
- *lack of transparency & poor communication
- *consolidation of decision-making authority within the ordained priestly role
- *absence of female participation
- *limitations imposed by Canon Law

. **KEY FINDING:** A critical component in the development of more effective governance is the revision of Canon Law. Currently, Canon Law consolidates authority exclusively to the ordained clergy with an absence of a definition of lay rights, responsibilities, and roles.

To move toward a more collaborative model the current process of appointment of clergy to leadership roles mandates reform to a method of election, specifically for the role of the bishop with a consideration of term limits. The proposed cultural changes also necessitate a revision of the formation process of priests and religious. A recommendation for consideration is

for the increased supervision of priests inclusive of ongoing performance evaluation, constructive feedback, and opportunity for growth in areas of deficit.

Drawing from best practices of other organizations three effective models emerged. The first model that warrants consideration derives from the Orthodox Church's *collegiality model* that effectively utilizes non-ordained individuals. The second model centers on a *two-trustee system* which incorporates expanded governance control inclusive of advice. Engagement of the laity lends itself, particularly to administrative roles. The third model draws from the discipline of healthcare. The *medical dyad model* integrates the best practices emerging from two previously competing entities, the patriarchic physician-run model and the corporate model.

Ron Rolheiser, OMI: Naming the Present Moment

Reverend Ronald Rolheiser, OMI presented the second mini-keynote, *Consecrated Life and Ordained Ministry: Naming the Present Moment*. Rolheiser is the President of Oblate School of Theology, a distinguished spiritual author, and a world-renowned speaker. Rolheiser framed the 2018 sexual abuse crisis in terms of a diagnosis, a prophecy, and as a call to conversion. Highlighting the present moment as a *crisis of the credibility of a clerical culture rather than of faith*, Rolheiser distinguishes the crisis of abuse and a crisis of the handling of the abuse. Rolheiser draws an analogy to the biblical image of humiliation and purification found in the Book of Tobit. To appropriately name the crisis, one must consider the distinction between pedophilia, ephrophilia/hebephilia, and sexual irresponsibility. Pedophilia understood to be a diagnosable disease without a cure, arises with regular incidence across the population. Additionally, the prevalence of sexual abuse in general within the culture occurs in 20 – 25% of the population before adulthood. Rolheiser identified the fault-line of the Church's abuse crisis to

be 2002, which resulted in the elimination of the pre-existing naiveté and the implementation of universal standards for the management of the sexual abuse of minors.

Rolheiser offered that the task today for religious and clergy is to carry this scandal biblically, to name the moment and respond in compassion in the imitation of Christ, and to prioritize healing, not self-protection as one's essential intentionality. Clergy are called to carry this crisis not as a distraction to their ministry, but *as* their ministry. It is the task of the clergy not to distance themselves from the issue, but to accept the painful humiliation as a graced opportunity.

As a start, Rolheiser suggested four pathways forward:

1. Individual consecrated and ordained ministers must witness credibility
2. The Church must integrate the laity, especially women, across all levels
3. The Church is to emulate biblical empathy with a preference to victims
4. Seminary reform as a response to a worsening clerical culture.

Rolheiser reminded all to understand the Church for what it is, in the words of Chesterton: "*The church is justified, not because her children do not sin, but because they do.*"²

The group discussions asserted that people are not naming the future; they are naming today. There is a saturation of the sensationalism of the scandal which distracts one from ministry. To overcome the barrier of distraction, a vision is necessary that concentrates efforts toward a unified goal. The small groups concurred that to achieve a renewed focus; it is critical to recognize that all are sinners, and as such one cannot avoid sin. Yet the recognition of sin, individual and social, must be overcome and the consequences of sinful action accepted. Critical to ministry is attention to victims of abuse through actions of apology, support, protection, presence, active listening, and prayer.

² G. K. Chesterton. *The Everlasting Man*. (Oxford: Oxford City Press, 2011), 5.

KEY FINDING: MOVING BEYOND ANGER. The small group work demonstrated consensus in the identification of the object of anger. The leadership of the Church, specifically the bishops, are the central repository of various feelings including anger, fear, resentment, shame, disgust, disappointment, frustration, and distrust. These intense emotions emanate from both the management of the crisis and the values which underpinned the decisions made. Anger stems from the prioritization of protecting the Church above the flock, from knowingly placing the vulnerable in harm's way, from validating inappropriate behavior through silence, from the concealment of truth, and from the implication that clergy is above civil law. The generation of anger emerges from the cover-up, the lack of transparency, the perpetuation of clericalism, the poor communication regarding the crisis, and the concerted effort to maintain the power structures of both individuals and the corporate Church. The faithful are angry that the abuse crisis places them in a position to discern the impact of the crisis on their relationship with the Church. One is forced to answer if staying in a broken Church makes one complicit in the Church's evils. Fruitful dialogue generated the recognition that all are challenged to respond to the evils perpetuated, with the recognition that there is a steep learning curve to that which constitutes an appropriate response, a response that heals and does not deepen the painful wounds of scandal.

While the bishops are the principal target of anger, nearly all participants excluded Pope Frances from this flood of emotion. Abusers, while at the receiving end of resentment and disgust, are concurrently recipients of mercy and compassion due to their illness. Those individuals who are capitalizing and profiting from the scandal incite resentment. For some, there was anger expressed at oneself for failing to identify the abuse crisis in totality and/or the

individual components thereof and the subsequent lack of an appropriate response according to one's position in the Church.

The small group discussions also offered a call for the reform of seminary formation. Seminaries need 1) to become less numbers oriented and more focused on quality candidates. 2) to move away from a cultic priesthood to a servant leader priesthood, and 3) to be open to a diversity of thought beyond the male patriarchal model.

Julie Craven: *Renewal at the Local Level*

Julie Craven presented the third mini-keynote: *Renewal at the Local Level*. Craven is the Director of Communications and Strategic Initiatives at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota and is a retired Vice-President of Corporate Communications for Hormel Foods Corporation. Sharing wisdom gained from the journey of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Craven holds dialogue and communication in high regard. The Minneapolis-St. Paul clergy sex abuse crisis which revealed hundreds of abuse cases with allegations against numerous clergy, resulted in the bankrupting of the Diocese of St. Paul & Minneapolis, both financially and spiritually. The fallout from this crisis impacted the Catholic faithful profoundly. The response of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish provides a best practice for rebuilding, healing, and thriving. Craven credits effective communication at the parish level as a critical component of the parish's recovery. Our Lady of Lourdes engages social media as a primary communication platform. Drawing from her professional background, Craven insists one should "*tell the truth, tell the whole truth, in one news cycle.*" Craven also warned that allowing attorneys to drive crisis communication frequently leads to communication failure.

Beyond communication, parishioner engagement is a cornerstone of Our Lady of Lourdes recovery effort, and Craven highlighted four noteworthy programs that contribute to hope and healing. The Restorative Justice and Healing Program offers concrete intervention for both perpetrators and survivors of harm. The Justice and Charity Committee's work partnering the parish with an Oblate mission in Tijuana advances a global connection which especially resonates with young people. Active engagement is encouraged through MSP Catholic, a digital hub intended to connect Twin City Catholics with resources and information. Vespers at Lourdes is a monthly night of prayer and intellectual formation for young adults who seek holiness in today's world and genuine community with other young professionals. Craven credits these programs in combination with the intentional engagement of the laity, especially women and young adults as the firmament of growth and recovery at the parish level.

KEY FINDING: NEED FOR APOLOGY & TRANSPARENCY. The most critical task necessary to minimize harm and promote healing is the offering of an authentic apology; no other strategy will orient the Church toward success. The effectiveness of this strategy is potentiated when offered in a culture of transparency. A recommendation put forth implores that the Church be proactive in managing the crisis; this requires a transition away from the frequently occurring reactive style of crisis management in response to journalist reports. Each new episode of abuse re-traumatizes survivors, clergy, and faith communities. Failure to address abuse, including failure to address abuse promptly, leads to a deepening of the scandal. It is advised to utilize the talents of the laity (Craven herself is an example) to navigate the communication quagmire of the sexual abuse crisis. The group proposed mentoring programs for clergy who are deficit or merely uncomfortable addressing the topic. Standardization of sexual

abuse reporting across the country adds value to the strategic initiative to move the Church forward.

It is difficult to categorize the appropriateness of the frequency or quality of communication from the pulpit regarding the sexual abuse crisis; as each parish is individual as is each priest who preaches. Reflections from the small group discussions offer that the information from the pulpit must meet the local needs of the congregation based on the congregation's experience. Participants identified two best practices: "Homily Duty," which is a structured process for weekly feedback for preachers that intends to improve the quality of preaching through constructive feedback. The second-best practice was in reference to Catholic Women Preach, an innovative project that offers the theologically informed perspectives of Catholic women.

Examination of the response of young Catholics to the sexual abuse crisis noted that Catholic youth have only known a Church riddled with scandal. The younger generation has never held ordained ministers on a pedestal. Of great concern to the group is that with every wave of crisis, justification or permission to leave the Church surfaces within the Church's youth. The sexual abuse crisis is the scapegoat for not attending Mass or actively participating in one's faith community. To ensure a healthy, fruitful Church in the future, young people should have regular access to Church leadership, enabling an opportunity to participate as their baptismal responsibility mandates.

Honorable Janine Geske & Rev. Dan Griffith: Restorative Justice

The fourth mini-keynote: Restorative Justice was co-presented by Reverend Daniel Griffith and the Honorable Janine Geske. Griffith is pastor at Our Lady of Lourdes in Minneapolis, Minnesota, a faculty member of the St. Thomas University School of Law and has

taught as an adjunct professor at the St. Paul Seminary School of Divinity. Griffith has served as an Archdiocesan of St. Paul and Minneapolis delegate for Safe Environment. Geske is an emeritus Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice and Marquette Law School Professor who has led conversations on Restorative Justice at the Vatican and throughout the world. Geske has served as a Distinguished Professor of Law at Marquette University Law School and Director of the Law School's Restorative Justice Initiative.

Following a summary account of the St. Paul-Minneapolis sexual abuse crisis, Griffith focused on the theological and biblical underpinning of Restorative Justice, addressing the harm and offering notes of hope. Application of Restorative Justice in the wake of the Catholic sexual abuse crisis centers on the biblical ideals of conversion, restoration, and justice. Restorative Justice initiates a counter-cultural approach which turns away from rampant individualism toward communal healing.

Griffith names the present moment as one of harm. Contributing to this harm is the clerical culture and the under-utilization of the gifts of the laity. Clericalism incites an attitude of self-preservation at the expense of the common good. Griffith identifies that the myopic vision of lawyers prevents the embrace and application of gospel values. There is ideological polarization, exemplified by the conservative position embraced by many Catholic seminaries. Diversification of ideological positions would well serve the Church. In the wake of the clergy abuse scandal, the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis led a collaborative pilot program on restorative justice and healing in the Twin Cities. Utilizing Our Lady of Lourdes' journey, Griffith illustrates the action of the Holy Spirit bringing a people from darkness to light, from despair to hope, and from spiritual bankruptcy to spiritual prosperity.

Geske built upon the work of Griffith through the discussion of case studies and personal reflections to illustrate the healing power of the Restorative Justice process and the utility of its application. Geske defines Restorative Justice as a theory of justice that addresses the harm by answering three questions: 1) Who was harmed? 2) What was the harm? and 3) How do you work at repairing the harm? Restorative Justice seeks to address harm and promote accountability by bringing people together in dialogue who have been affected by crime or misconduct. Geske points out that it is critical to consider the ripple effect of an offense, noting that the proper delineation of the impact upon the survivor, the perpetrator, and the community potentiates healing. **KEY FINDING:** Several Restorative Justice anecdotes shared by Geske illustrate the potential healing power the process could afford individuals and the Church as it continues to navigate the sexual abuse crisis.

Conclusions & Recommendations

Primary Recommendations

- Offer an authentic and heartfelt apology for the sexual abuse crisis.
- Create a new culture that embraces the teachings of Vatican II, specifically in regards to engagement of the laity.
- Create a new model of parish and diocesan governance through the revision of Canon Law.
- Promote a new culture that values diversity and embraces the gifts and talents of the laity through structures of co-responsibility.
- Create a new culture through embracing diversity and integrating diversity across all levels of the Church's governing structures.
- Act compassionately and mercifully toward survivors of abuse.
- Adopt policies that prioritize survivors needs above all else.
- Reform seminary formation to reduce, minimize, and eliminate clericalism.
- Reform seminary formation to transition from a cultic priesthood to a servant leader priesthood.
- Utilize Restorative Justice as at every level of the Church touched by the abuse crisis to facilitate healing, compassion, and justice

Secondary Recommendations

- Create a new leadership culture based on transparency, competency, and accountability.
- Create a new culture through enabling a more collaborative system of checks and balances shared between ordained, religious, and lay faithful.
- Create a new culture through the establishment of lay boards comprised of appropriately qualified individuals to evaluate cases of abuse and to hold ecclesial leadership accountable.
- Create forums for dialogue between the leadership of the Church and the faithful, and particularly, provide a process to express moral or ethical concerns about leadership in a given diocese.
- Create consulting bodies that reflect the diversity of the Church, not the mind of the governing bodies.
- Adopt a servant leader model of Church governance modeled on Christ.
- Re-establish gospel values as the guiding principles of decision making.
- Manage the crisis through the establishment of standards of reporting for all cases of abuse. These standards would include a clear standard of due process for the accused, a delineated process for the release of names and information that respects due process, a definition of what constitutes a case of abuse, the establishment of a timeframe for reporting, and the action taken by the local Church regarding the management of the offender.
- Manage the crisis through the employment of professional communication experts as opposed to attorneys.
- Re-establish Church and Church leadership credibility through the routine practice of honest, transparent communication.
- Research and adopt best practices from other disciplines to improve the operations, administration, and communication of the Church.
- Consult broadly tools of the social sciences for mission, culture, and self-understanding.
- Revise Church governance structures by including lay advisory collaboration in the selection of bishops.
- Reform seminary formation by utilizing a model of education that includes deacons, women religious and the laity to prepare priests to work in collaboration with all Church vocations.
- Expand the option of ordination to the diaconate for women and allowing priests to marry.
- Identify and emulate models of resilience at each level of the Church.
- Utilize the sexual abuse crisis to enable the Church to serve as a role model in crisis management and as an advocate for human rights on the global stage.
- Follow Pope Frances in his actions to manage expectation in the wake of the crisis.
- Actively pursue the mission appointed by Christ, not the agenda of hierarchical Church.